

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
SEPTEMBER 9, 2006

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Bob Connell  
Lori Hunter  
James Johnson  
Lindi Johnson  
Nola McKinney

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Harold Brewer  
Buddy Spivey

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Sharon Berry  
At Large Representative (Vacant)

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Jim Hill  
Ramona Sangalli  
AER Ex-officio (Vacant)

DHHS Representative: None

Attorney General's Office Representative: Tom Gay

Governor's Office Representative: None

DSB Staff Present: Jim Hudson, Katy Morris, Coral Virden, Carolyn Holbrook, Jim Pearson, Donna Walker, Mary Cabaniss, Kandy Cayce, Ginny McWilliams, Kara Aaron, Chris McKenzie

**CALL TO ORDER.** Chairman Mrs. Lindi Johnson called the meeting to order.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA.** Motion was made by Mrs. Nola McKinney to approve the agenda. Mr. James Johnson seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.***

**INTRODUCTIONS.** All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

**APPROVAL OF 06/10/06 MINUTES.** Motion was made by Mrs. McKinney to approve the minutes. Mr. Harold Brewer seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.***

**DSB DIRECTOR'S REPORT** - Congratulations to Chief of Field Services Donna Birdwell upon her recent marriage to Rick Walker of Malvern. Her name is now Donna Walker. Welcome back to Area Supervisor Kara Aaron who recently returned to work after the birth of her son, Will, last April. We are glad to have Kara back. Congratulations also to former DSB Rehab Teacher Chris McKenzie upon her promotion to Area Supervisor.

RSA REVIEW – Federal representative Melodie Johnson has provided a report of the RSA on-site visit conducted in early June. In general the report is highly complimentary of DSB. It also suggests target areas where we should focus efforts in order to improve documentation and services to vocational rehabilitation consumers. There was a discussion held with Ms. Johnson regarding the constant threat of elimination faced by programs providing specialized services for the blind, and even by general rehabilitation programs serving all other disabilities. Ms. Johnson stated that in fact there is a threat; as evidenced by the downsizing of RSA, and that rehab agencies have to be vigilant and demonstrate the worth of the VR program. She noted that every state having a separate state agency for the blind must justify the value of the specialized services each congressional session.

RANDOLPH SHEPPARD VENDING PROGRAM – The strength of the vending program as a viable career, exclusive to blind persons, continues to be threatened. Senator Ted Kennedy is seeking to broaden the Randolph Sheppard program, established in 1936, to extend its business opportunities and protections to other disability groups. A similar move occurred in 1971 when the Wagner-O'Day Act of 1938 was expanded into the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program. This Act extended governmental contracting privileges to programs providing job opportunities to all individuals having a severe disability. Previously such contracts were reserved to programs employing persons who were blind. The issue that has triggered Senator Kennedy's proposal is the high income produced at some vending locations, such as air bases. Most of those vendors are not employing blind persons among their staff operating the locations, and Congress is looking at forcing an increase in the overall employment of severely disabled persons by extending Randolph Sheppard privileges to include all disabled persons.

NATIONAL CONSUMER MEETINGS. This past summer national meetings were held by the two major consumer organizations. The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Convention was held in Dallas, and had several delegates from Arkansas. Chris McKenzie is the state NFB president. The convention's focus was on vocational rehabilitation questions and how to serve cases. Ms. Lori Hunter represented the DSB Board at NFB national and reported that there was a lot of new technology and the conference was very educational. Mrs. Nola McKinney represented the DSB Board at the American Council of the Blind national convention in Jacksonville, Florida. Most impressive was a young blind speaker who gave a vivid account of the September 11 disaster. There was also new technology, diabetes seminars, and the controversy regarding changes in Braille.

REAUTHORIZATION OF REHABILITATION - Congress is still grappling with the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. Numerous differences remain between the Senate and the House. The heads of the state rehab agencies,

both blind and general, are working together to support legislation to effect positive changes for the rehabilitation programs throughout the country.

**STATE BUDGET PROCESS.** DSB has completed its biennial budget request for consideration by the General Assembly beginning in January. The request seeks general revenue totaling a little over \$250,000 the first year of the biennium, and a little over a half million the second year, for additional Rehab Teachers in the Older Blind Program. DSB tracks the unmet needs of both VR and Older Blind consumers in the state each month. Currently, the reports show an average 66 to 70 older blind persons each month for whom DSB must postpone Rehab Teaching services because of insufficient funds for staffing and purchased equipment and supplies. Consumers who are interested in this issue, should make their concerns known to their specific legislators. Elected officials want to hear from their constituents, not from state agency personnel.

**HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT (HAVA)** – Elections are coming up. The accessible machines are supposed to be up and running. The machines did not work well during the last election. Consumers have filed complaints with the Secretary of State's office regarding problems with the voting machines.

**JUMPSTART** – DSB program manager Ms. Kandy Cayce reported that Jump Start 2006 was successful again this year, as a joint effort between DSB and the Arkansas School for the Blind. Seventeen students applied and all were accepted into the program, with sixteen completing the program. Almost a third of the students were from public school. Three of the Jumpstart participants expressed intentions to attend college in Arkansas and one student is planning to take business courses to become a farmer. DSB is continuing efforts to lengthen the duration of the Jumpstart program.

**VENDORS' ANNUAL MEETING.** The Blind Vendors' Sales Seminar was held August 4-6, 2006 in North Little Rock. The vending program continues to have difficulty attracting young people into the program. It is hard to market new locations when we don't have people who are ready to step into them. Board member Mr. Harold Brewer reported that the Annual Meeting went well for those who attended. Most of the vendors now are older, and Arkansas has lost a lot of locations.

**HIGH PERFORMANCE CULTURE INITIATIVE.** The DSB Director and Assistant Director attended the DHHS High Performance Culture Initiative training recently, which focuses on core beliefs of the department and the individual divisions, and how we interact with other divisions to tailor our actions to reflect those common beliefs. Several other DSB managers are scheduled to attend this training in coming months.

**WORKFORCE** – DSB has been participating in a special Workforce Investment Board committee initiative to identify the services provided to and the needs of

disabled persons who seek services in the one-stop centers. A survey was conducted regarding all the workforce centers and data is being compiled and analyzed.

## **END OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE REPORT** – Committee Chair Mrs. Nola McKinney expressed her appreciation to fellow committee members, Mr. James Johnson and Mrs. Sharon Berry. The DSB staff winners for 2006 by service category: Direct Services: Tanya VanHouten; Clerical Services: Judy Magner; and Support Services: Carol Marshall. Tanya VanHouten was named the Overall DSB Employee of the Year for 2006. Mrs. McKinney congratulated the winners and noted how tough it is to select a winner in each category and an overall winner.

**OLDER BLIND CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY REPORT** – DSB Case Reviewer, Mrs. Ginny McWilliams, discussed the survey process. For the first time in its long history, the Older Blind Consumer Satisfaction Survey was conducted in conjunction with the Mississippi State University Center on Blindness and Low Vision. The resulting report will be separated into two parts. The first, given today, will reflect DSB consumer responses and satisfaction with the Older Blind program. The second report, scheduled for the December Board Meeting, will include a comparative analysis of consumer satisfaction with the Older Blind program in multiple states across the nation.

The DSB surveys were mailed to 784 Older Blind consumers in the appropriate media along with postage-paid return envelopes addressed to Dr. Brenda Cavanaugh of Mississippi State University. The survey consisted of nine questions. Of the 784 surveys mailed; 6.8% were returned undeliverable. 303 surveys were returned for 2005, representing a 41.5% return rate. Of those returned, 95.5% voiced satisfaction with the program.

Following is a summary of the response rates to each question. Question 1: Services were provided in a timely manner. 97.4% of those surveyed agreed with this statement. Question 2: My telephone calls were returned promptly. The overall satisfaction rate was 95.4%. Question 3: I was treated with courtesy and respect from all staff. 99.3% of respondents agreed. Question 4: I feel my teacher provided me with relevant information and services for my specific situation. The overall satisfaction rate was 95.5%. Question 5: My teacher was attentive, concerned and interested in my well-being. The overall satisfaction rate was 97.2%. Question 6: I am satisfied with the amount of contact I have with my teacher. 94% of respondents agreed. Question 7: My teacher was familiar with technology and techniques used by blind and visually impaired people. The overall satisfaction rate was 97.9%. Question 8: Overall, I am satisfied with how the services helped me achieve my goals for independent

living; 94.5% of respondents agreed. Question 9: I feel that my present vision-related needs have been met. 88.6% of respondents agreed with this statement.

The survey allowed a place for brief comments by consumers both positive and negative. Mrs. McWilliams noted that complaints always receive a follow up to ensure they are resolved, if possible, within agency policy.

**DSB TRANSITION PROGRAM ACTIVITIES** – DSB Area Supervisor Mrs. Kara Aaron reported on agency efforts in the Transition Program. DSB transition services are designed to ensure that there is not a gap between student progress in high school and success in post-secondary education or employment. In addition to the Jumpstart transition activities that DSB conducts with the Arkansas School for the Blind, Agency staff are working very closely with the State Department of Education/Special Education Unit to coordinate agency transition efforts at the local, state, regional and national levels. The goal is to identify critical issues and formulate action plans to improve lifelong outcomes for young adults with disabilities. DSB is a founding member of the Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership, which also includes, among others, State Education, General Rehab, Developmental Disabilities Services, Disability Rights Center, Arkansas Independent Living Council and Disability Coalition. DSB is working to increase its teamwork with the transition staff of Educational Services for the Visually Impaired – ESVI. ESVI is State Education's outreach program for the public schools. ESVI staff will be joining DSB briefly during its statewide meeting in October for this purpose. DSB counselors and other staff have attended transition training sponsored by State Education and are participating in teambuilding activities at all levels. The plan for the local teams is to have school administrators, teachers, service providers, local Chamber of Commerce, local advocacy groups, parents, students, post secondary representatives and area employers, all coming to the global transition planning meetings. One team, meeting in central Arkansas earlier this year, had a visually impaired student from North Little Rock as a team member.

**DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER REPORT (DRC)** - No representative was present. No report was submitted.

**ARKANSAS INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPORT (AIRC)** – No representative was present. A report was submitted with the board packet.

**CONSUMER INPUT** – The state National Federation of the Blind Convention will be held September 29-30, 2006 at the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs.

The State District Meeting for the Lion's Club will be held November 3-4, 2006 in Jacksonville.

There is much controversy currently about creating a uniform Braille code. The code used in North America is different from that used in most other parts of the world. The International Council on English Braille is looking at creating a uniform English braille code, which would require modification of Braille used in North America. So far, the Braille Authority of North America has not agreed to the proposed change.

A consumer reported that she had received training in the use of colored filters to assist in bringing sharpness to printed material. The filters stripped away three to four layers of fuzziness from her vision. The consumer could see more details after the training.

During an employment conference in Arlington, Virginia, a former DSB client employed with NASA was very complimentary of DSB's Employee of the Year, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tanya VanHouten.

A consumer who was totally blind in his left eye, recently had a cataract removed and a lens implant to correct the vision in his right eye. The consumer is now able to drive.

**Schedule of Next Meeting** - The next board meeting will be held Saturday December 9, 2006, at 10:00 a.m. at the Department of Health and Human Services, Donaghey Plaza South Building, 700 Main Street, First floor Conference Rooms A & B.  
The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sharon Berry  
Secretary